

Postpredicative copulas and the remnants of OV word order

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1. Introduction

In Standard Norwegian and Swedish, predicative adjectives always follow both the copula and the main verb, both in simple and complex tenses, as exemplified below with a sentence with the copula *bli* ‘become’ in the perfect tense, see (1) and (2). Word order in the examples was chosen to show that the order is independent of V2.

- (1) Kaffen er blitt **kald** / ***kald** blitt (Nor.)
coffee.DEF is become cold / cold become
 ‘The coffee has become cold’

- (2) Kaffet har blivit **kallt** / ***kallt** blivit (Swe.)
coffee.DEF is become cold / cold become
 ‘The coffee has become cold’

The order between a predicative adjective and the copula verb does not differ between main and embedded clauses, see Faarlund et al. (1997:748) for Norwegian and Teleman et al. (1999:4:18) for Swedish. This is shown in (3) and (4).

- (3) ...som er **gammel** / ...som ***gammel** er (Nor.)
that is old / that old is
 ‘...that is old.’

- (4) ...som är **gammal** / ...som ***gammal** är (Swe.)
that is old / that old is
 ‘...that is old.’

This rule is the same also with modal auxiliaries, i.e. the predicative adjective cannot intervene between the modal auxiliary and the non-finite verb.

However, in some non-standard varieties of Scandinavian, a predicative adjective may be placed before the copula verb in embedded clauses, and before the main verb(s) in a main clause. Both possibilities were tested in the ScanDiaSyn survey across Norwegian and Swedish dialects.

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntax Database (NSD)

In the NSD, the placement of a predicative adjective between the copula and the main verb has been tested in a main clause containing an active participle, see (5).

- (5) a. Kaffen er **kald** blitt (#613) (Nor.)

coffee.DEF is cold become

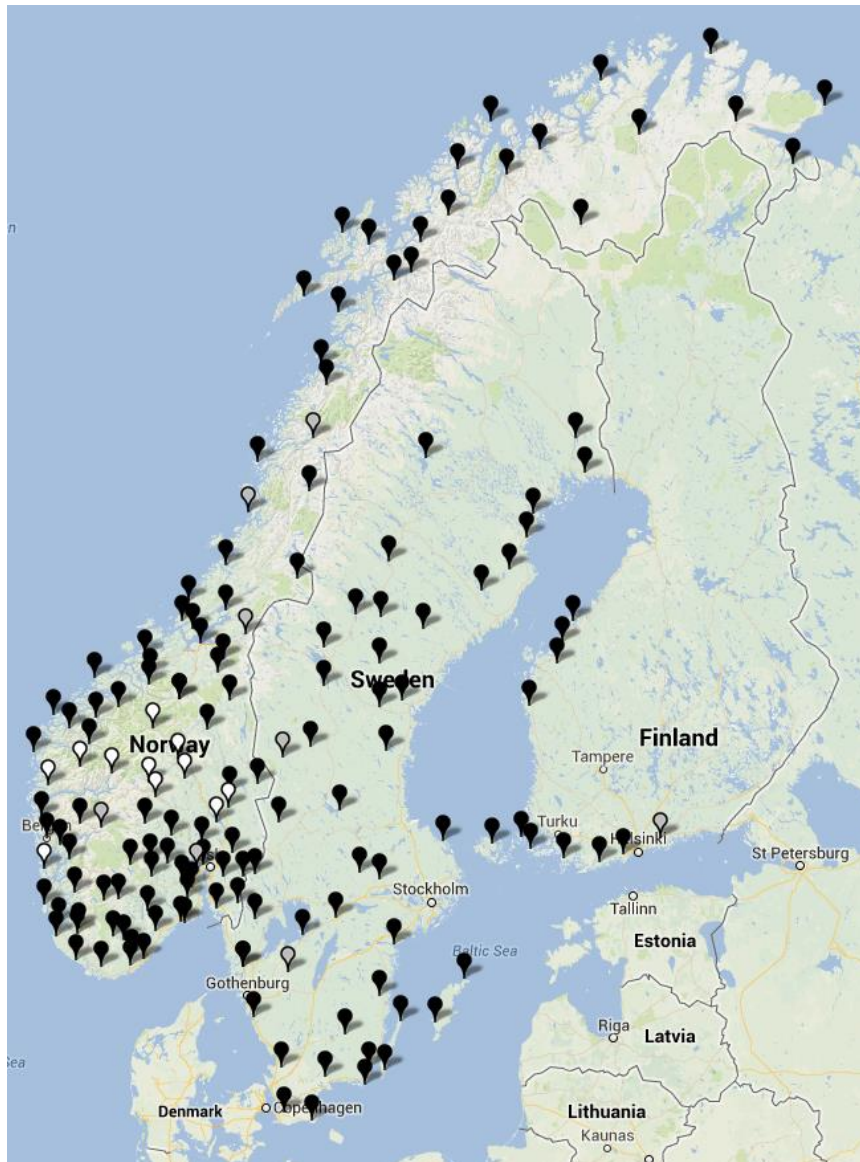
‘The coffee has become cold’

- b. Soppan är **kall** bliven/vorden (#613) (Swe.)

soup.DEF is cold become

‘The soup has become cold’

As Swedish generally disprefers an active participle together with the verb *vara* ‘to be’ (Larsson 2014, Lundquist 2014), it is not expected that (7b) will be judged as grammatical by many Swedish informants for independent reasons. The results are shown in Map 1.



Map 1: Main clause with postpredicative copula

(#613: *Kaffen er kald blitt. 'The coffee has become cold.'*)

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

The sentence is only accepted in a few places in Central and Western Norway, in the provinces of Hordaland, Sogn og Fjordane, Oppland, and Hedmark. In Sweden and Finland, the sentence is not fully accepted anywhere.

2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus (NDC)

The placement of a predicative adjective between the copula and the main verb is by no means frequent, but it is certainly attested in the NDC. All of the three places, where it is found, are located in Central Norway (in the provinces of Sogn og Fjordane, Oppland, and Nord-Trøndelag), as shown on Map 2. The attested examples are given in (6) – (8).

(6) Nå e dæ **sjlikkt** vorrte att... (Nor.)

Now is it so become that

‘Now, it has become like that, that....’ (lom_03gm)

(7) ...nå du e **gammale** vårtn. (Nor.)

when you are old become

‘...when you have become old.’ (luster_03gm)

(8) De e **poppulært** vårte, menn... (Nor.)

it is popular become but

‘It has become popular, but....’ (meraaker_03gm)



Map 2: Main clause with postpredicative copula as attested in the NDC
(White = places of attestation)

The informants, who produce this word order, also judge the test sentence (#613) as grammatical or, at least, as marginally possible. In other words, postcopular predicatives can be attested in the areas expected from the results of the survey, or – in different words – there is correspondence between the reported and the attested language. Interestingly, but perhaps not astonishing, all the sentences are produced by older informants.

In embedded clauses, postpredicative copulas are sparsely attested in the NDC. The examples come from the informants in Central and Northern Norway (the provinces of Møre og Romsdal, Nord-Trøndelag, and Nordland) and two of the total of three examples, are uttered by older speakers. Apart from the recording in Sunndal that was made 1971, the two remaining occurrences of the construction are recent (recorded in 2009 and 2010). The examples are given in (9) – (11) and the locations are shown in Map 3.

(9) te åss såmm **onng** va (Nor.)

to us that young were

‘...for us who were young’ (inderoey_03gm)

(10) de såmm **værre** va... (Nor.)

that what worst was

‘That, what was worst...’ (mo_i_rana_02uk)

(11) å de såmm **væsst** va... (Nor.)

and that what worst was

‘And that what was worst...’ (sunndal_ma_01)



Map 3: Embedded clause with postpredicative copula as attested in the NDC.
(White = places of attestation).

As can be seen from the results above, the word order *predicative adjective – copula* in embedded clauses and the order *copula – predicative adjective – main verb* in main clauses is still attested in a few Norwegian dialects. It is however not found in the Swedish dialects, one of the reasons probably being the small corpus and the infelicitous test sentence (#613) that may be rejected by the Swedish-speaking informants due to independent reasons (cf. Section 2.1 above). The acceptance of the pattern among the informants is limited to a number of Norwegian locations. The judgements from the NSD seem to correlate well with the spontaneous data from the NDC. There are only few examples in the corpus, but they come from areas expected given the results from the NSD.

3. Discussion

3.1 Age variation in the NDS and the NDC

The placement of a predicative adjective between the copula and the main verb is more often accepted by older than by younger informants in the NSD; cf. Map 4 (younger speakers) and Map 5 (older speakers) below.



Map 4: Main clause with postpredicative copula

(#613: *Kaffen er kald blitt. 'The coffee has become cold.'*)

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)



Map 5: Main clause with postpredicative copula. Older informants. (#613: *Kaffen er kald blitt*. 'The coffee has become cold.')

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

Among older informants, the construction is not only accepted in a higher number of Norwegian locations than generally, but it is also judged as grammatical by the Swedish informants from the province of Västergötland (Floby). The reason that the tested sentence gets a medium score in some location is that older and younger speakers make different judgements.

In the NDC, the postpredicative copulas are almost exclusively produced by older speakers, with one exception: a younger woman in Northern Norway (Mo i Rana in Nordland) who produces the sentence in (10) above.

3.2 Theoretical issues and the historical development

The order *predicative adjective – verb* is found both in main and in embedded clauses. The origin of the phenomenon *may* be different in main clauses compared to embedded clauses. Therefore, main and embedded clauses are kept apart here. Whereas the word order *predicative adjective – verb* in main clauses can be a remnant of the earlier OV-pattern (that is to some extent attested in Old Norse, see for instance Faarlund 2004:161-163), the same word order in embedded clauses may have its roots in Stylistic Fronting.

A typical example of an OV-pattern is an object preceding the verb(s) in a main or an embedded clause, cf. (12) from Old Swedish.

- (12) Allir **skulu** kirkiu **dyrka**
all *shall* *church* *revere*

‘Everybody shall revere the church.’ (Magnusson Petzell 2011:142)

The OV-pattern is attested in Old Norse (e.g. Faarlund 2004:161-163) and in Old Swedish (e.g. Wenning 1930, Delsing 1999, Magnusson Petzell 2011), where it is definitely prevailing (Delsing 1999, Magnusson Petzell 2011). In Swedish it is lost in the end of the 18th century (Magnusson Petzell 2011) and in Icelandic during the 19th century (Hróarsdóttir 1996:130). Instances of a predicative element preceding the finite verb are part of the OV-pattern (Magnusson Petzell 2011:142, 163; Hróarsdóttir 1996:99), see (13).

- (13) þá höfum við heldur aldrei **óvinir** verið. (Ice.)
then *have* *we* *neither* *never* *enemies* *been*

‘Nor have we then ever been enemies.’ (Hróarsdóttir 1996:98)

Following Hróarsdóttir (1996) and Magnusson Petzell (2011), I assume here that predicative adjectives placed in front of a verb/verbs are to be classified as instances of OV word order. Placement of predicative elements in front of a verb seems to be the last instance of the OV-pattern: according to Magnusson Petzell (2011:170), arguments preceding a verb are the most frequent variant of OV in Swedish during the second half of the 18th century, when the percentage of OV is about 15%. This last instance of OV is found in Scandinavian dialects, where a predicative adjective may precede the copula verb *varda* ‘become’ in a main clause (Iversen 1957:233), cf. two examples from the Stange dialect in eastern Norway (14).

(14) a. Kaffen er **kæld** vørtin (Nor.)
coffee.DEF is cold become
 ‘The coffee has become cold’ (Aasen 1999:211)

b. Hæn er **gammæl** vørtin (Nor.)
he is old become
 ‘He has become old’ (Aasen 1999:211)

In Övdalian, an East Scandinavian vernacular spoken in Western Sweden, both predicative elements and pronominal object could still precede the verb in the beginning of the 20th century, see (15).

(15) Add int dier **ånum** stjuo’ssað, eld? (Övd.)
have not they him given-a-lift or
 Have they not given him a lift, or what? (Levander 1909:122)

As for postpredicative copulas in the embedded clauses, these are quite frequently attested in the older stages of many Scandinavian dialects, just to mention the following Norwegian dialects: Tromsø (Iversen 1918:81), Salten (Brekke 2000:152), Kristiansand (Johnson 1942:162-163), Stavanger (Svendsen 1931:138), and Oppdal (Haugen 1982:156). Iversen (1957) claims that the pattern is common in Norwegian dialects in general. The same pattern is known from Övdalian. An example from the dialect of Oppdal is shown in (16a), and an Övdalian one in (16b).

(16) a. Hainn såmm **såkkå** va. (Nor.)
he that guilty was
 ‘He that was guilty.’ (Haugen 1982:156)

b. Dier djär so, dier so **gamblest** irå. (Övd.)
they do so they who oldest are
 ‘They, who are oldest, do like that.’ (Levander 1909:122)

The origin of the pattern in (15) can be threefold: (1) Stylistic Fronting, (2) final placement of the verb in embedded clauses, and (3) OV. It is difficult to determine what construction have given rise to it, and therefore the most probable hypothesis is that all of them have interfused into the structure shown in (16). This is supported by the diachronic data: for Swedish, we know that the OV word order becomes a peripheral phenomenon during the 18th century (Magnusson Petzell 2011:178), while final placement of the verb is still attested in the second half of the 17th century (Magnusson Petzell 2011:164-165), and that Stylistic Fronting is lost during the second half of the 17th century (Falk 1993:182). All the three phenomena are thus lost about the same time. In this way, the pattern in (16) can be seen as the last instance of both Stylistic Fronting, OV word order, and the final verb placement in embedded clauses.

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Web sites:

- Nordic Atlas of Language Structures (NALS) Journal: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nals>
- Nordic Dialect Corpus: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>
- Nordic Syntax Database: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>